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481]

[482

TO

SIR FRANCIS BURDETT, BART.

"In WHAT MANNER can a Reform of Par-
liament take place, WITHOUT CRE-
ATING CONFUSION?"

SIR,

Having, in my last letter, shown, that a reform of parliament *would do a great deal of good*, it shall now be my business to answer the second of the questions, which *fear*, at the suggestion of *craft*, is continually putting to us. Before, however, I proceed to shew, that a *timely* reform might be, and would be, effected without the smallest chance of creating confusion, a preliminary remark or two are called for on the conduct of those crafty and corrupt men, who suggest this question to the ignorant and the timid.

Why should any body suppose, that *confusion* would be created by restoring the people at large to the enjoyment of the most important of their undoubted rights? We know well enough what infamous confusion *now* reigns at every general election. Why, then, is *confusion* so much dreaded? It will be shown, by and by, that a reformed parliament would be chosen by means the most simple, the most quiet in their operation, the most fair, and the best calculated to prevent those scapes of tumult and violence and

beastly conduct, which now disgrace elections; but, before proceeding to the detail of these means, let us again ask these pretended lovers of peace and harmony, *why* they suppose, that a reform of parliament, above all things in the world, would be likely to create confusion?

The Habeas Corpus Act could be suspended for seven years at one time; new treasons could be invented; addition upon addition to the severity of the penal code; punishment heaped on punishment for the sake of collecting a revenue; fiscal system diving into every man's most private concerns; persons empowered to enter our houses, take account of our windows, horses, dogs, carriages, and servants; numerous acts of parliament, *each exceeding the New Testament in bulk*, to impose taxes and penalties upon the people; a system of watching us so close that no man can be said to have any thing private; ballotting for a militia, for a supplementary militia; a volunteer system; a yeomanry cavalry system; an army of reserve system; a levy-in-mass system; a local militia system. All these and a hundred other schemes and measures, adopted, undone, re-adopted, abandoned, exchanged, modified; and, at every step, *penalties and forfeitures*. All these have taken place, and no *confusion* seems ever to have been apprehended, though complexity and vexation and pains and penalties made the most

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conspicuous figure throughout the whole series. But, now, alas; when a *reform* is talked of, though nothing be in contemplation but a mere restoration of the undeniable rights of the people and the putting an end to corruption, profligacy, and waste, *confusion* is affected to be apprehended!

Confusion in what? In the mode of the election? There is now a greater bulk of laws and cases and decisions and expositions and reports relative to elections: these now amount in bulk to more than any man could read through in *seven years*, allowing himself time barely sufficient for eating and sleeping! This, Sir, you know to be a fact. And yet, the "*harpies*," as the noble old Major calls them, affect to be alarmed at the *confusion* that the putting an end to this shocking system will create! The *confusion*, which exists at elections, as they are now carried on, is notorious. A considerable part of the people come out of the scandalous strife with black eyes, bloody noses, broken limbs, or disordered minds; and, yet the *peace-loving* "*harpies*" fear confusion from the *opposite* of this system! No, Sir, what they really apprehend, is, that confusion amongst the *people* would cease, and that confusion *to themselves* would begin. This is what they apprehend; and, without my saying another word, *they* are answered.

But, for the satisfaction of persons, who really mean well, and who have been alarmed by the horrors, hatched by these base and crafty deceivers, I will show in

what manner a parliamentary reform would take place without the smallest chance of creating any confusion other than *confusion to the harpies*, who now prey on the nation's vitals. If a set of magpies, or carrion crows, were engaged in tearing out the eyes and pecking away the flesh of a poor unfortunate flock of sheep, to fire amongst them with a good charge of shot would certainly "*create confusion*;" but, not confusion *to the sheep*, who, on the contrary, would, I imagine, find themselves relieved from confusion. In sultry summers the maggots, which are engendered in the fleeces of our flocks, proceed by degrees 'till they eat into the flesh of the animals, who discover their pain by stopping suddenly, then starting, then running their noses against the ground, then looking round at the part affected, then lying down, then jumping up and running away; they sweat all over; the tears run down their faces; fever leads to madness, and madness to death. But, the faithful shepherd comes in time, and by the application of his *shears* and his *wash*, creates confusion amongst the filthy devourers, and restores the flock to ease and to happiness. No question, Sir, that the Magpies and the Carrion Crows, and that the Maggots too, if they could squall, would cry aloud against the reforming shepherds; but, the flock, I take it, would be very grateful to them for their exertions, and would entertain no fear of experiencing *confusion* from the change.

When I say, that a reform of parliament might be, and would be, effected without the smallest danger of producing

confusion, I must, of course, be understood to make the assertion with this condition, namely, *that the present parliament would agree to the measure in the form that it shall be proposed*; for, if they will not, if they be resolved to persevere in rejecting the prayers of the people for reform, then, of course, a reform cannot possibly be effected *without* confusion. If this be what the sons and daughters of corruption mean as the source of confusion, they are right enough as to the *effect*, but it will then remain for them to find out a *justification* for the *cause*. But I must presuppose the consent of the present parliament to the prayers of the people; and, in that case, I am able to prove, that the reform would take place without any chance of creating confusion amongst the people; and without putting at hazard the lives and properties of any portion of the rightful owners of the country.

Another objection of the harpies, is, that the reformers are *divided in opinion amongst themselves* as to the *precise details* of the reform which they pray for. What petty and what base cavilling is this! Do we not know, that no bill of any great importance was ever passed without such division in the opinions of its advocates? Do we not always see, that the *principle* of the bill is, first made matter of discussion, that blanks are left in it to be filled up in a Committee, that, in their committee, *alterations and additions* are made; that, after all this, the bill is frequently *amended* by the Lords? Nay, does not the bill, when it becomes a law, frequently contain a provision for its being further altered during the same session of

parliament? Indeed, what proposition, what measure, ever was, amongst any body of men, introduced in any other way? And, what impudence, then, is it in the advocates of bribery and corruption to tell us, that, though these are as "no-
torious as the Sun at noon day," they ought to continue to exist, because those who wish to put an end to them have not, every man of them, signed *before-hand*, an instrument binding himself to the precise regulations to be adopted to prevent their return? At this rate, too, how could *any law* ever be passed? It is the *majority* who decide; but the reformers are required to be *unanimous*. They are so as to the *principle* of the measure; and they will, as in all other cases, insist, that the detail must and shall be left to a decision by a majority.

However, it is necessary to state somewhat of the *outline* of the reform that we seek; because, as is the case in most other good causes, there are *sham* reformers, who mean any thing but that which the people wish for and want. What the people seek is a real reform; a restoration to the whole of their own rights, without violating the rights of others. The rights of the people, according to Magna Charta; according to the constitution and the ancient laws of the kingdom, are, *That they are to be taxed only by their own consent*; and that they shall *YEARLY* chose their *representatives*. These are the essentials. That every man, who pays a *tax*, of any sort, into the hands of a taxgatherer, shall, by his representative, *give his consent to such a tax*, which he cannot do, unless he vote

at elections for Members of Parliament, who impose the taxes. It is also an essential, that the election should be *annual*; because the ancient laws say so; and because we know from fatal experience, that a *three years'* parliament, voted themselves into a *seven years'* parliament; and that the seven years' parliament have loaded us with a debt; the interest of which is pressing us to the earth, and the principal of which has been employed in supporting French Emigrants, in subsidizing Germans, in restoring the Bourbons, the Pope and the Inquisition, and in other ways equally beneficial to the country.

It is quite necessary, that the people should be put on their guard against the *Triennial Trick*. It has already been begun to be played off by the hirelings of one of the factions. The object of it is to divide the friends of reform. Mr. Fox played it off *Thirty years ago*; and he at last played a good pension into the hands of Mrs. Fox and her daughters, though he never, *after he was in place*, once, *talked even*, of a parliamentary reform. It is, therefore quite necessary, that the people should be cautioned against the tricks of these sham reformers, who are only so many enemies' spies in the camp of reform.

This is an old, and has often been a very successful trick of a crafty enemy. "*Divide and destroy*" is the maxim of tyrants. First they openly oppose; but, when that is like to fail, they seek to undermine by dividing. They, better than any body, know the history of the *bundle*

of sticks; and they seek to separate the bundle, that they may snap them one at a time. As to the *detail* of reform, it is of little consequence; but the main principles must be adhered to inflexibly; these are, that *every man who pays a tax of any sort into the hands of a taxgatherer, should vote for members of the Commons House; and that parliament should be chosen annually*. To make the right of voting consist in possession of this or that species of property; to make free-hold or copy-hold or lease-hold or life-hold a title to voting, would be to rob the people of their right; and, to allow a man to be a representative for more than a year without being re-chosen, has in it neither justice nor common sense, to say nothing about its being contrary to the spirit of the constitution and to the *very letter* of the ancient laws of England.

Upon this subject I beg leave to introduce the opinion of that most learned lawyer and excellent man, Mr. BARON MASERES, who has for so many years been Cursitor Baron of the Exchequer, and whose exertions in the cause of civil and religious liberty have been exceeded by those of very few men. In 1812 this venerable lawyer and patriot (whom, I suppose, Canning would call a Jacobin) republished the LETTERS of the famous GENERAL LUDLOW, in which Letters there is the following passage "What! was it a "*gracious favour* to secure us the sitting "*of a Parliament once in three years,* "*when the antient laws gave us a right* "*to annual parliaments?*" Upon this passage Mr. BARON MASERES inserts, in a note, the following remarks of his own,



which remarks are well worthy of the attention of every real friend to reform.

“The statute of the 4th year of King Edward III. Chapter 14, A. D. 1331, is in these words; ‘Ensement est accordé que Parlement soit chacun un une foitz; ou plus, si mestier soit.’ That is, ‘Item it is accorded, that a Parliament shall be holden every year once; and more often if need be.’ And in the 26th year of the same King, Chap. 10, it is enacted as follows. ‘Item, pour maintenance des dits articles et Estatutz, et redresser diverses mischies et grevances, qui viegnant de jour en autre, soit Parlement tenu chacun au, sicomme autrefois estoit ordeigné par Estatut.’ That is, ‘Item, for maintenance of the said articles and statutes, and redress of divers mischies and grievances which daily happen, a Parliament shall be holden every year, as at another time was ordained by Statute.’”

“And this statute was regularly observed to the end of the reign of the great King Edward the 3d, and through the greater part of the following reign of King Richard the 2d; as is clearly shewn by that learned and zealous friend to Public Liberty, Mr. *Granville Sharp*, of the Middle Temple, in pages 159, 160, 161, &c.—170, of a very able tract, entitled, ‘*A Declaration of the people’s Natural Right to a share in the Legislature*,’ of which a second edition was printed in the year 1775 for Benjamin White, Bookseller, in Fleet Street. And, amongst the several instances which he has there cited of successive years, in

“each of which a new Parliament had been summond by the King, by a New Writ of Election; he mentions some years in which two, or more, new Parliaments had been summoned, by different Writs of Election, in the space of a single year, or without royal prorogation of the preceding Parliament, to meet again at another day, in the course of the same year, as has been the practice for the last two Centuries. So that it may truly be affirmed, that in those antient times the people enjoyed the privilege of electing new representatives in Parliament, either once in every year, or more than once, if the King found it necessary to have a second Parliament, before the expiration of a year.

“This seems to have been a very useful privilege, as it tended much to strengthen the connection between the Members of the House of Commons and their Constituents, or Electors, of whom they are Representatives, or in the language of the Writ of Election sent to the Sheriff, the Attornies, or persons who have received from them, full and sufficient powers to consult with the King and his Council, upon the important matters relating to the state of the Kingdom, that shall be laid before them, and to consent, on the behalf of their Constituents, or Electors, to the resolutions that shall there be taken concerning them. ‘Ita quod Milites plenam et sufficientem potestatem pro se et communitate Comitatus prædicti, et dicti Cives et Burghenses pro se et communitatibus Civi-

" tatum et Burgorum, divisim, ab ipsis
 " habeant ad faciendum et consentiendum
 " iis quæ tunc de communi consilio (fa-
 " vente Deo) ordinari contigerint super
 " negotiis ante-dictis; ita quod, pro de-
 " fectu hujus modi protestatis, dicta
 " negotia eneeffecta non remaneant quovis
 " modo.' — See Elsyng's Method of
 " holding Parliaments in England, pages
 " 68 and 69.—For hence it seems evident,
 " that, according to the Antient and ori-
 " ginal Constitution of the House of
 " Commons, there ought to be a general
 " agreement, or concurrence of opinion,
 " upon the subjects, for the discussion of
 " which the Parliament was to be assem-
 " bled, between the Electors of the
 " several Counties, Cities, Boroughs, and
 " the persons they were so to empower
 " to represent them, and act for them:
 " and, surely, that agreement, or con-
 " currence, would be much more likely
 " to take place, if the elections were to
 " occur once, or more than once, in
 " every year, than if they are renewed
 " only once in the course of seven years,
 " as may be the case according to the
 " laws now in being.

" Now, if this good old law were to
 " be revived, would there be any dan-
 " ger of such violent and expensive,
 " and often ruinous, contests at the
 " time of Elections, as are seen in the
 " present mode of proceeding, when the
 " general Elections occur only once in
 " about six years? For, as the Repre-
 " sentatives would be constantly disposed
 " to cultivate the good opinion of their
 " Constituents, and, by their conduct in
 " Parliament, to promote their interests

" and wishes, as far as their own con-
 " sciences and judgments would allow
 " them; in order to be re-elected by
 " them in the next year, it is probable
 " that there would be much fewer con-
 " tested Elections, and changes of the
 " Representatives, than there are at pre-
 " sent. And from the harmony that
 " would generally subsist, between the
 " Members of Parliament and their Elec-
 " tors, the Dignity and Respectability of
 " the House of Commons would be en-
 " creased, and the confidence of the
 " people, in the wisdom and uprightness
 " of their measures, would be restored;
 " and the resolutions that would be taken
 " by them, would be generally allowed
 " to be in reality, what they are now
 " often called and pretended to be, the
 " true expressions, or declarations, of
 " *the sense of the people at large*,
 " on subjects to which they relate. It
 " seems probable, therefore, that the re-
 " vival of this good old law, for chusing
 " new Parliaments every year, would be
 " attended with very happy consequences
 " and give general satisfaction to the
 " nation.

" And if this law for annual new Par-
 " liaments were to be revived, it seems
 " reasonable that the day for the said
 " annual election, and likewise the day
 " of the meeting of the Parliament for
 " the dispatch of business, should be
 " certain known days in the year, fixed
 " by the law, just as the first days of
 " Hilary and Michaelmas Terms are in
 " the King's Courts of Justice in West-
 " minster Hall, for the beginning of the
 " Sessions of the King's Judges in those

“ Courts, for the decision of suits at law ;
 “ to the end that the Right and Duty of
 “ the two Houses of Parliament to assist
 “ and concur with the King in the im-
 “ portant business of making new laws,
 “ and repealing, or altering, old ones, as
 “ occasion should be, and be universally
 “ known to be an essential, permanent,
 “ regular, and indispensable, part of the
 “ constitution of the British Government,
 “ as much as the administration of justice
 “ by the King’s Judges in his Courts at
 “ Westminster-Hall, and not a temporary
 “ and occasional instrument of govern-
 “ ment to be employed only at the King’s
 “ pleasure, whenever he should think fit
 “ to have recourse to it ; and that no fu-
 “ ture King, who should happen to be in-
 “ flicted with the malady of King Charles
 “ the First, ‘ an inordinate love of arbi-
 “ trary power, and a strong disposition
 “ to make himself an absolute Monarch
 “ over his people,’ should be tempted
 “ to tell his Parliament, as King Charles
 “ did his in the year 1627, ‘ To remem-
 “ ber that Parliaments are altogether
 “ in his power, and that therefore,
 “ as he finds the fruits of them to be
 “ good or evil, they are to continue,
 “ or not to be : as is shewn above in
 “ page 33.’

“ And if this salutary old law were
 “ to be revived, the first day of the
 “ month of October in every year,
 “ (if it were not on a Sunday, and in
 “ that case the 2d) would probably be
 “ found to be a convenient day for the
 “ proceeding to a general election ; and
 “ some day about the middle of the fol-
 “ lowing month of November, as, for

“ example, the 17th (if it were not on a
 “ Sunday, and in that case the 18th) to
 “ be a convenient time for the meeting of
 “ the Parliament for the dispatch of busi-
 “ ness. The 17th of November was the
 “ birth day of that great Princess, Queen
 “ Elizabeth, who governed the nation
 “ forty-three years with great wisdom and
 “ justice, and in great harmony with
 “ her Parliaments, and, by their advice
 “ and assistance, delivered the English
 “ nation a second time from the yoke
 “ of the Pope’s authority, and the
 “ cruel persecutions that had been
 “ lately practised under it, and esta-
 “ blished the protestant religion on a
 “ solid and lasting foundation ; and also
 “ caused the laws to be administered, in
 “ her Courts at Westminster Hall, in a
 “ stable and uniform manner, by learned
 “ and upright Judges, well selected for
 “ the purpose, whereby property of
 “ every kind became more secure and va-
 “ luable than it had ever been before ;
 “ and who likewise greatly encouraged
 “ and advanced the trade of the nation,
 “ and laid the foundation of its navigation
 “ and maritime power. These were
 “ great and eminent services to her
 “ subjects, which have justly made her
 “ memory dear to their posterity ; and
 “ (to use the words of Mr. Thomas May,
 “ in the beginning of his excellent History
 “ of the last Parliament of King Charles
 “ the First,) ‘ they were accomplished by the
 “ justice and prudence of her government,
 “ by making the right use of her subjects’
 “ hearts, hands, and purses, in a Parlia-
 “ mentary way.’ It seems, therefore,
 “ that it would only be a just tribute
 “ to her merits and memory to make a

"choice of her birth-day, the 17th of November, in every year, (being in a part of that month that is very convenient for the purpose,) for the first day of the meeting of the new Elected Parliament."

Here, Sir, we have not only an account of the *law* of the case, but we have the opinion of a man of great learning and talent, and with more than three quarters of a century of experience to guide him. This is no Jacobin, at any rate, though, I dare say, the impudent spawn of the Green Room would condemn him to eternal flames, if they could, as a Jacobinical Reformer. We have here some of the powerful *reasons* on the side of annual parliaments; and, indeed, no further reasons are necessary to be stated, because the thing is so manifestly proper, that the reasons for it cannot fail to suggest themselves to every mind. All, therefore, that the reformers have now to do, is to adhere to the above stated main points: *Every man who pays a direct tax to have a vote; and parliaments to be elected annually.* These being adhered to, the detail cannot do harm: these given up, no detail can do any good.

Having thus shown what the principle of the reform ought to be, and having supposed, that the present parliament will agree to, and pass a bill, brought in for carrying a reform into execution, I shall now proceed, not to state all the details of such bill, but to *show how easily a new and reformed parliament might be chosen and returned.*

As every male tax-payer would have a vote, and the number of members for every county in the three kingdoms would, of course, be proportioned to the number of the inhabitants within each county, there would be very little difficulty in apportioning what number of members each county should send. We have the *population book*, recently enough compiled.— Suppose, therefore, the whole of the population to amount to 15,000,000, the whole number of members to 658, as it is now, and Hampshire to contain 300,000 inhabitants; the *question*, with regard to Hampshire, would be, if 15,000,000 return 658, how many ought 300,000 to return? And the *answer* would be, 13 members. Thus would the proportion be determined with the utmost facility; or, to prevent fractional parts, it might be settled that every 20 or 30 thousand inhabitants should be a title to a member. These would be matters of minor consequence, however, and would admit of a very easy arrangement.

It may be thought by some persons, that the number of members sent by each county, ought to be in proportion to the number of *tax-payers* in each county, and not in proportion to the number of *inhabitants*. I am of a different opinion, because, after all, those who pay no direct taxes ought to have some weight; and they ought, at any rate, to be as nearly represented as possible. But, if it were resolved on to take the numbers of *tax-payers* as the criterion, nothing would be more easy than to obtain an account of those numbers. It would be collected in less than a month. And I would engage

to make out the scale of proportion, and to settle the whole matter with the greatest accuracy in the space of one week from the time of receiving such account.—Where, then, is the difficulty so far? And, where is the fear of confusion?

The number of members for each county in England, Ireland, and Scotland being fixed on, and it being settled that every payer of a direct tax should have a vote, the next thing to be considered would be, *in what manner the election should take place*. “Aye,” say the harpies, now let us see what a pretty *bustle* you would kick up!” No, Sir, we should have no bustle at all. We shall have no *canvassing* attornies and agents gallopping throughout the country; no lying, fawning members, giving false shakes of the hand to a poor fellow whom they pass by the next month as if he were a dog; no filthy knaves kissing men’s wives and daughters, and *spewing gold* into their mouths, as my father told me he once saw at *Haslemere*, and as I myself very nearly saw in the Borough of *Honiton*, where the people openly avowed that the sale of their votes was their “*blessing*.” We shall have no ribbons and flags; no drums and trumpets; no election balls, at which the higher and lower orders of the sons and daughters of corruption mix in base and filthy familiarity. No rattling of post-chaises to the county towns; no hogsheads of muddy beer served out in the streets to a deluded and debased populace; no drunkenness, no riots, no bruises, no murders. But, in lieu of all these, we should have one day in each year, spent by sober and

thoughtful citizens, in deliberately exercising the important right, and performing the great duty, of choosing proper persons to speak their wishes in the making of laws, and in guarding the rights, the honour, and the freedom of their country.

You have often said, that you want **NOTHING NEW**; and so we say all. Even in the regulations for the taking of the voice of the people, I, for my part, see no necessity for any one *new establishment*, or for any one *new office*, or new officer. Our excellent *form of government*; our excellent *ancient laws*; our excellent modes of carrying on the business of a nation, leave us *nothing new* to wish for. The election would take place on one and the same day throughout the whole of the United Kingdom; and, as I shall now proceed to show, might be all completed, the returns made, and the new parliament assembled in the space of one month.

On the day fixed on by the law, of which due notice would be given in every *parish* by posting at the Church Doors, and also from the Pulpit, if that was thought necessary, the *Church-wardens* and *Overseers* would meet *at the Church*, where there would be a *box*, into which the Voters would put each his ballot, on which he would have previously written, or caused to be written, the names of those men, whom he wished to be chosen for his county. Let us suppose, then, the Parish of Botley to be the particular scene before us. The county is to give ~~thirteen~~ members, and every voter is, if

he chooses, to vote for thirteen men. *Nicholas Freemantle*, for instance, having heard all that has been said for this man and against that man (for he would hear a great deal) writes down thirteen names upon a bit of paper, takes it in his hand, and away he goes to the Church. The Churchwardens, who have charge of the ballot box, ask *his name*; the Overseers look into their rate-book to see whether he be a *tax-payer*; finding his name there, they bid him put in his ballot; which done, home he goes to his business. If the Overseers do not find him to be a *tax-payer*, he, of course, does not vote.

Between nine in the morning and five in the afternoon should be the hours of polling. In large cities, there might be numerous ballot boxes, with additional copies of the rate-book, and deputies to the Churchwardens and Overseers. At Botley, and in almost every parish, there would need but one ballot box, and the election would be over and completed without even a *bustle*, by twelve o'clock in the day.

On the next day, the Churchwardens and Overseers would, being all assembled together, open the ballot box, and make out their return. They would take out the several ballots, write the names of all the persons voted for upon a piece of paper, and ascertain from the ballots how many votes each had got. They would then, on the same day, transmit by the hands of the senior Churchwarden, not only the *result* of their investigation, but also the *whole of the ballots*, to the High Sheriff of the County, who should be

ordered to be present and in constant attendance at the County-town, for the purpose of receiving the parochial returns, and for other purposes, to be mentioned by and bye. The Churchwardens and Overseers should make their return in somewhat the following words:

“ Botley, Hants, 2d Oct. 1817.” (*for such, I hope, will be the date.*)—“ We, “ the Churchwardens and Overseers of “ the Parish of Botley, in the County of “ Southampton, hereby certify to the “ High Sheriff of the said County, that, “ in obedience to the law, we held in the “ said parish, an election for members of “ parliament, on the first day of this “ present month; that, after keeping “ the poll open during the hours pre- “ scribed by the said law, and punctually “ observing all the provisions thereof re- “ lative to the receiving of votes, we have “ opened the ballot box, and having, “ with great care, examined the several “ ballots, find that, for A there are 71 “ votes, for B 54 votes, for C 19 votes, “ &c.; and that we have put all the said “ ballots into one parcel, which we have “ sealed with our seal, and have herewith “ transmitted the same to the High She- “ riff, in order that he may verify, or “ correct thereby the return which we “ have above stated.”

Now, I will venture to pledge my life, that an election like this would take place, not only without *confusion*, but without the loss of one single day's work in the parish, except with the parish officers themselves, which could not possibly be a matter of any great moment, espe-

cially if they were allowed to charge for their time in their usual annual accounts, and which no human being would grudge.

With what facility, with what celerity, would these returns all find their way to the High Sheriff, a copy of each being recorded in a Parish-book, to provide against accidents? Then would come the duty to be performed by the High Sheriff. He, with his deputy and with a sufficient number of clerks (four would be amply sufficient), would first compare each parochial return with the ballots; when all the parochial returns were verified, or corrected, in the presence of the Chairman of the Quarter Sessions and the Clerk of the Peace, the High Sheriff would make out a County Return in somewhat the following manner:

“Winchester, 10th October, 1817.

“I, A. B. High Sheriff of the County of Southampton, hereby certify, that I have received the returns from all the parishes in the said County, of the votes taken for Members of Parliament on the first day of this present month; that I have, in the presence of the Chairman of the Quarter Sessions and of the Clerk of the Peace, carefully compared all the said returns with the respective parcels of ballots, transmitted to me; that, after such comparison and verification, or correction in case of error, I have found, that this county has given for A. so many votes, for B. so many, &c. and that A. R. T. S. M. N. O. P. Q. W. X. H. and K. are the thirteen persons, who have more votes for each of them than any other person has had

“in this county at this election; and that I have deposited, under my hand and seal, and also under the hands and seals of the Chairman of the Quarter Sessions, and of the Clerk of the Peace, the said parochial returns and parcels of ballots, together with a copy of this return, in the Office of the High Sheriff of this County.

“A. B. HIGH SHERIFF.

“Signed in the presence of

“C. D. Chairman of the Quarter Session.

“E. F. Clerk of the Peace.”

This return might be sent to the Crown-Office, and there kept till the Parliament should meet. The Sheriff, on the very day of closing his return, should make proclamation in his county, and which proclamation should contain a copy of the return; so that the people would, at once, be informed on whom the election of their county had fallen.

Now, Sir, can you conceive it possible for any confusion to arise out of a series of proceedings like these? We should have no rioting, because there would be nothing to provoke or irritate; no drunkenness or bribery, because no fortune could drench, and much less bribe, forty or eighty thousand voters; no false-swearing, because we would have no swearing at all, from the first to the last; no ill-blood and spite amongst neighbours, because no man (unless he chose it) would let any other man know whom he voted for. We have a great advantage over our brethren in America as to our instruments in this business. They have no Church-wardens and Overseers, known to the law, and are,

therefore, compelled to choose what they call *Judges of Election* in their several townships, which they do, very quietly indeed, at previous meetings. The same might be done in Ireland and Scotland, where the parish officers are not exactly upon the same footing as they are here. But these are mere trifles. A day's thinking amongst any half dozen of men of sense would produce every regulation that would be of any importance in the conducting of the business.

The Churchwardens and Overseers are now elected annually by the majority of the tax-payers in the parishes. They are always, and necessarily must be, persons of consideration in the parish; they are entrusted with its real property and its money. There can, therefore, be little danger of their *wishing* to make a false return, and still less of their *daring* to do it; and, besides, the penalty, in case of detection, on *any one*, whether parish officer, sheriff, chairman of the quarter sessions, clerk of the peace, or any other person, concerned in making or conniving at a false return, or in obstructing an election, or retarding the transmission of a return, should be so heavy and so disgraceful as to preclude almost the possibility of the commission of such a crime.

All would, therefore, be regularity, celerity, truth, fairness, instead of the disorder, the tardiness, the falsehood, and foul-play that now prevail. ROUSSEAU has observed, "that the English are free " only 14 days in 7 years; and that the " use which they then make of their free-
" dom proves that they ought to be slaves

" for the rest of the period." To be sure, the use that is now made of the 14 days is such as to deserve execration; but it is not "*freedom*" that exists during the 14 days. There is the mistake of this great writer. We are not now free during the 14 days: these days are only so long a time for the base and corrupt in low life to revel at the expence of those in high life. It is a season resembling nothing that ever was heard of amongst men, except the Saturnalia in Rome, during which the slave-owners let loose their slaves that they might indulge in all sorts of beastly excesses, in order that their own children might, by the odiousness of vice, be terrified into virtuous and decent habits of life. A reform would effectually rid our country of this stain on its character—this deep disgrace—this infamy of infamies.

I have no *fondness for any scheme* of mine, but I am wonderfully attached to your idea of seeking *nothing new*, if we can make use of what we possess already. All that we complain of are *novelties*. We want no new divisions of the country; we want no military and taxing "*dis-
tricts*;" we want no "*divisions*;" we will take the boundaries of ancient standing; we will take the officers of ancient standing; we will take the Churches and the County Halls for the scenes of our operations; we want nothing but the constable's staff and the sheriff's wand in the way of force; we want no *discipline* and no *commanders*, but those which the laws of peace afford us in abundance.

The voting by *ballot* is, in my opinion, the best; but the other mode would create

no difficulty in the execution. *Viva Voce*, if that be thought best; and then the voter has only to read his names, sign his card, and put it in the box. There would arise from this no other difficulty than that which would arise from the possible ill-will, which, in some cases, a man's voting on one side, or the other, might excite against him from his friends, or employers. I am for the ballot; but, it is not a matter of very great consequence; because such ill-will would, if expressed, or acted upon, become extremely odious; and because there would be very little motive for its being entertained.

There is a thought occurs relative to the persons, who are now entitled to vote as *free-men* of cities and boroughs, and who, unless they were *tax-payers*, would be cut off from the exercise of this privilege. But, if it were judged reasonable, that the present *free-men*, though not *tax-payers*, should continue to vote in their towns and cities, that would be a matter of no moment; but unless resident there, they should not be permitted to vote, because they would, if *tax-payers*, have a right to vote in any parish, in which they might reside. In short, this would make part of the *detail*, and it would be a matter of very little consequence in which way it should be settled. In some cities it might be best to vote by *Wards* instead of *parishes*, as long custom is not easy to overcome. In extra parochial places, the adjoining parish would be the place of voting. But, one year would put all these things to rights.

The *exclusions* from the right of voting

should, it seems to me, be confined to *foreigners* and to persons convicted (by a *common jury*, of course), of *infamous crimes*, and especially of crimes against the right of election, which should be deemed infamous in the highest degree.

As to the *qualifications of members*, they should consist, not of a pocket full of money, nor of a sham estate, nor of a good thumping notoriously false oath; but of such qualities and endowments as the voters might take a fancy to. Who ought to judge of the qualifications of the person employed besides the person who has to employ him? An estate, whether in money or in land, does not confer wisdom or integrity. The people would be the best judge of whom it was their *interest* to choose. If a whole people were left to choose measures for themselves, is it to be believed, that they would choose measures injurious to their interest especially if free and ample discussion were on foot? Is it to be believed, that the people would choose men whom any one could prove to have been guilty of what was injurious to them; or whom any one could prove to be likely to wish to do them harm? Is it to be believed, that we, in the country, should vote for gypsies or trampers? Or that the people in cities would vote for swindlers and pick-pockets? "Demagogues," of whom the sons and daughters of corruption are for ever telling the people to *beware*, would find few to vote for them. To hear *Demagogues* harangue may possibly amuse a small part of the people; but it is one thing to be amused by mountebank, and another to entrust him with the making of

laws affecting our property and lives. But, the fact is, that the real "Demagogues" are all on the other side; for Demagogues are *deceivers*, and not those who utter *truth*, in language however violent. Upon this head therefore, there would need no one measure of precaution. The people would, for the far greater part, choose men, of good character and of some ability; and, if any county found itself deceived, the deception could not be very detrimental, seeing that, at the end of the year, they would take special care to choose other persons.

To those, who have the insolence to affect to apprehend, that the tax-payers, if left to their own free choice, would choose foolish and wicked men to represent them and to impose taxes upon them, the *answer* is in America, where the people not only freely choose *one house*, but the *other house too*, and the *Chief Magistrate into the bargain*. And do they choose penny-less Demagogues? Do they choose fools and robbers? It is notorious that they choose, for the far greater part, not only men of distinguished talent, but men of wealth and estate, whose means have enabled them to study, and whose fortune has kept them out of the reach of temptation to do wrong. Why, then, should we suppose that the people of England or Ireland would fix their liking upon fools or knaves? The truth is, Sir, that this assertion is only another of the instances of the impudence of the *Spoken of the Green Room*, and the like of them.

There need be none of those odious exclusions of Members of Parliament from

being *Ministers* or *Pensioners* or any thing else. These are only so many miserable palliations for a deep-rooted and wide spreading disease. If a person was so remarkable for his talent or his wisdom as to be an object of choice both with the king and the people, why should not his talent and his wisdom be used by both? These pitiful exclusions are odious, because they are grounded upon the presumption of *corruption* existing, and, indeed, upon the still more odious presumption, that the king is the enemy of the people. Besides, we know how *nicely* they are got over now; and that they are, in fact, no exclusions at all. The whole of these miserable *precautions* would be rendered unnecessary by the annual recurrence of an election. If the King chose a Member of Parliament to be one of his Ministers, and the Constituents disapproved of their Member being a Minister, why, they *would not re-choose him*; that would be all. He would soon be before them again. There would be *no time* for heart-burnings upon the subject. The evil, if it were thought one, would be speedily redressed, and that, too, without any clamour or any upbraidings.

The *harpies* appear to be extremely uneasy at all the *Meetings* in Palace Yard, in the City, at Nottingham, at Bolton, in the Counties. Would they really wish to *get rid of them for ever*? Let them, then, come forward for *reform*; for, most assuredly, there would never be any other Meeting any more, except at the annual election. We should never more hear a word about *public petitions*. The means of *redress* for every grievance

would be *constantly at hand*. There would be no Meetings and no Tumults, because there could not possibly be any ground for any such. The ancient law, above quoted by Mr. BARON MASERES, gives this very reason for annual parliaments: "Item: for maintenance of "the said articles and statutes and "the redress of divers mischiefs and "grievances, *which daily happen*, a parliament shall be holden *every year*, as "formerly was ordained by statute."—So that this was *no new law* even in 1331; and does not the *same reason* exist for annual parliaments now? An annual *new* parliament, too, because in those days, the parliament was always *elected every time that was called*; and not the same set, as now, called together year after year, which has no tendency at all to afford the people a chance of any redress, and can have, therefore, no tendency to induce them to be quiet, or to cease to meet and to petition. At this very moment, for instance, the country is all in a commotion of Meetings and Petitions.—Meetings are every where called, and about to be called, *to take into consideration the distresses of the country, and the remedies to be adopted*. But, if all the tax-payers had just chosen men to represent them in parliament, what need would there be of any such *Meetings*? The people would have no ground for meeting in this partial manner, and with minds so heated with their sufferings. They would know, that they had chosen the fittest persons they could think of to consult on the state of affairs, and would patiently wait the result of their consultations, and would submit with fortitude

to whatever sufferings they had to endure.

Would a reform, then produce *confusion*? No: but it would, because it must, produce order, peace, and harmony. This the *harpies* know as well as we do; but it is not order, peace, and harmony that they want. They want confusion amongst every body but themselves. They love to see one part of the people armed against the other part. They want the country to be miserable, that they may wallow in ease and luxury.

But, Sir, it is now time to *talk no longer*. The time of *acting* is now come, and of this I am extremely happy to hear that *you* are fully sensible. There is *no violence* wanted. The country now understands clearly the cause of its ruin; it knows that the remaining mode of seeking redress, is, by *petition and remonstrance*; it is ready to perform its duty, and there only wants an *uniformity of movement* to send you to the House loaded with the people's prayers. The application for reform in the shape of a *Bill*, ready prepared, is all that will then be wanted, and for the making of this application the nation with confidence looks up to *you*. Lord MILTON said, that he "*wished to come to close quarters with "the reformers,*" a wish which will, I trust, very soon be gratified. The House is fond of things "*in a tangible shape,*" and I hope their fancy will now be pleased as much as it was in the case of the Duke of York and Mrs. Clarke. When a *Bill* has been brought in, or even moved for leave to be brought in, every

one will see in detail that which is wished to be done. The people will, then, in a very few weeks, know to a *certainty*, whether they are to expect a reform or whether they are not. The state of uncertainty, in which they now are, is the worse state in which they can possibly be; but, I venture to predict, that it is a state which will not long endure.

One would imagine, Sir, that it was impossible for any body to be so blinded by their wishes as to expect, that things can go on as they are. There is, indeed, nobody except downright fools that do expect it. Every one believes, that some *great change must take place*. That it cannot, without reform, be a change for the better, I am quite sure; and I have heard of no man who pretends to point out any means of producing good without a reform. I have shown, I think, that a reform may *now* take place without any chance of creating confusion; but I will by no means take upon me to say, that, at a *future period*, even reform will prevent confusion. The confusion and bloodshed, which took place in France, were laid to the charge of the Revolutionists; but those who merited the charge were *the Government and its adherents*. Mr.

ARTHUR YOUNG, who was travelling through France during the first of the violences in that country, observes, in his travels, written upon the spot, that all the outcry directed (in England and elsewhere) against those, who were burning country-seats, and ill-treating the noblesse and their families, should have been directed against those, who by their loads of vexatious taxes and impositions and other acts of tyranny, and by the refusal of all redress, *drove the people to madness and despair*. It is in vain to tell men that they are in danger from violating the law, when they feel that it is impossible for them to be worse off than they are.

I have now, Sir, I think, given the *harpies* an answer to their two questions, and proved that a reformed parliament would *do a great deal of good even now*, and, if speedily adopted would take place *without producing confusion*.

I am, Sir, with great respect,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

WM. COBBETT.

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